

From Primal to Postmodern Ecommunism

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The most ancient Eurasian mystical traditions achieving a state of Communion that discloses the true, single nature of all animate and inanimate entities veiled by the illusion of inherent multiplicity—including Indian Shaivism, Himalayan Bön, Chinese Taoism, Persian Zurvanism, the Egyptian cult of Osiris and the Greek Dionysian mysteries—had their origin and hub in Mount Kailash (Namkhai Norbu, 1982/2004; Capriles, 2000a, 2003, 2004, work in progress-vol. I; Daniélou, 1992). These traditions viewed human spiritual and social evolution as a gradual development of the basic delusion that the Buddha called *avidya* and Heraclitus called *lethe*, consisting in unawareness of the single nature of all entities and the illusion that these entities are self-existent, and views this development as the source of a process of gradual degeneration that destroys the original state of affairs, which I call ecommunism in that it involves political and economic communism together with integration and harmony with the ecosystem, and gives rise to a succession of ever more degenerate social, political, economical and cultural systems. Finally, the delusion that developed during the time cycle reaches the extreme at which it proves not to work, achieving its *reductio ad absurdum* and being surpassed together with the social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural systems that developed interdependently with it—upon which ecommunism is restored in a new way, for in my view technology, which as a result of the ensuing revolution of the human psyche (just as Marcuse [1972, p. 61] envisaged it) becomes integrated with the ecosystem, is an element of this new ecommunism.

In India the time-cycle was called *kalpa* (Tib. *bdkal pa* or *kal pa*), but different traditions divided it in different ways. Some partitioned it into fourteen *manvantara*, which then they subdivided into four *yuga* or eras, whereas others divided the *kalpa* directly into these four *yuga* or eras, and still others divided it into three *yuga* or eras only. All traditions that posited four *yuga* or eras, regardless of whether or not they posit *manvantara*, referred to them as: (1) *krityayuga* (age of perfection) or *satyayuga* (era or Truth); (2) *tretayuga* (age of three); (3) *dwaparayuga* (age of two); and (4) *kaliyuga* (age of darkness or black era: the period of utmost degeneration). Those traditions that divided the cycle or *kalpa* into three *yuga* or eras, called them: (1) *satyayuga*; (2) *dharmayuga* (age of the Law), and (3) *kaliyuga*. In Zhang Zhung (which included present day Tibet), the ancient Bönpo emphasized the fact that in the primeval state of total plenitude and perfection property and political power were nonexistent, and that these developed in the course of the progressive “Fall” corresponding to the degenerative evolution and history of our species.

The Persians, Greeks and Romans shared the practice of naming the successive eras after metals, each less “noble” than the former: the golden age of perfection was succeeded by the less perfect silver age, which was followed by the more degenerate bronze age, which in its turn was followed by the iron age, in the last period of which degeneration reached its utmost expression. In Greece, after successive Aryan invasions effaced the degenerative view, Hesiod re-imported it from Persia; later on, in his book Heraclitus allegedly referred to the circular vision of becoming; finally, the Stoics re-introduced the original schema of political, social and economic degenerative evolution beginning in the condition in which there were absolutely no social differences, no property, no exclusive

family and no State or political power. (Also in Judaism there is talk of four ages called after metals: the *Book of Daniel*, probably inspired by Eastern traditions, mentions the successive kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze, and a mixture of iron and clay, after which God will establish an everlasting kingdom. In Christianity, Clement of Alexandria and Origen [Origenes Adamantius], and later on Desiderius Erasmus, admitted a circular vision of becoming bearing the influence of Heraclitus and the Stoics; more diluted versions of this view are found in Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, and several others.)

In ancient China, the two most characteristic systems of thought were Taoism and Confucianism. The former, which is one of the mystical traditions of Communion having its source in Mount Kailash (Capriles, work in progress, vol. I), associated itself closely to the lower strata of society, and to the communitarian structure and function of hamlets. In its turn, the latter—whose practice was limited to the regulation of behavior, both at the individual and the political level—developed on the basis of the pre-existing worldview of Heaven and Earth, associated to the Empire and the mandarin state. Among these systems, the former upheld the degenerative view of human evolution and history, in a version that will also be briefly reviewed below; however, there is no evidence whatsoever that Taoists ever posited either eras (*yuga*) or *manvantara*.

In the initial Era of Perfection, Age of Truth or Golden Age, the Communion state in which the true, single nature of all entities was realized nonconceptually and nondually, characterized by absolute plenitude and perfection, and by what Tarthang Tulku (1977) called Total Space-Time-Awareness, alternated with the incipient form of the delusion the Buddha called *avidya* and Heraclitus called *lethe*. However, this delusion being extremely mild, it failed to give rise to the unhappy consciousness that constitutes the first noble truth of Buddhism and to the *Angst* that according to existentialism and *Existenzphilosophie* constitutes the bare experience of the being of the human individual. With the passing of time, it became gradually more difficult to enter the state of Communion, so that only few practitioners of ancient Wisdom traditions could gain access to it, and in the subsequent state delusion became progressively more powerful, giving rise to ever-increasing *Angst*, an ever unhappier consciousness, and in general ever more negative consequences. In our time, which marks the final stage of the of the Age of Darkness, Black Era or Iron Age, and hence of the cycle, delusion and its negative effects have reached their utmost expression: the technologically enhanced project of exploitation of humankind and the whole of the ecosystem has produced an ecological crisis in the ecosphere, society and the individual, which proves that it was based on a delusory perception and thus constitutes the *reductio ad absurdum* of this delusory perception. Thus humankind has reached the threshold level at which it can surpass the delusion that developed during the cycle, and if this occurs in time to prevent self-destruction (personally, I am convinced final destruction will not occur at the end of this cycle), a new cycle will begin with a new Age of Perfection, Age of Truth or Golden Age—or else we will enter the roughly analogous Millennium of plenitude and perfection announced in the *Tantra Kalachakra* of *Vajrayana* Buddhism and in analogous traditions of Christianity, the Ismailian tradition of Islam (Parain, Ed., 1972, p. 281) and so on. As we have seen, this new age will be ecommunist: free from all forms of property, the State, the individual family, and involving significant equality in all planes—political, social, economic, sexual, racial, and even between children and their elders.

Despite my diametrical opposition to the extreme fascist, theistic Traditionalist movement, I find the above to be aptly expressed in Biblical and Koranic imagery by the following excerpt from Siraj Ed-din (1974, p. 29):

In all parts of the world tradition tells us of an age when man lived in a Paradise on earth. But although it is said that there were then no signs of corruption upon the face of earth, it may be supposed, in view of the Fall which followed, that during this age the perfect human nature had become the basis for gradually less and less spiritual exaltation. This is to be inferred from the story of Adam and Eve, whose creations are said to mark different phases passed through by mankind in general during this age. The creation of Adam and his adoration by the Angels is taken to refer to a period when man was born with Knowledge of the Truth of Certainty. The creation of Eve thus refers to a later period when man began to be born in possession of the Eye of Certainty only, that is, in the state of merely human perfection: in the beginning Eve was contained in Adam as the human nature is contained in the Divine, and her separate existence indicates the apparently separate existence of the perfect human nature as an entity in itself.¹ Finally the loss of this perfection corresponds to the loss of the Garden of Eden, which marks the end of the Primordial Age.

The beginning of Eve's separate existence also marks the rupture of the state of psychological hermaphroditism that in Persia was represented by Zurvan and in India was represented by the form of Shiva called Ardhanarishwara, in which human beings of both sexes needed not negate in themselves the essence of the sex that did not correspond to that of their bodily shape, and in which—insofar as in Jungian terms this meant that males had no *anima* and females had no *animus*—there could be no conflicts among the sexes.

Despite the fact that, as note above, Taoism does not posit *yuga* or eras, some Chinese texts list successive periods in the degenerative evolution of our species, which they link to the lives of renowned characters (real or fabled) in Chinese prehistory and history. In the *Wen-tzu* we read (Lao-tzu, 1994, chap. 172, pp. 245-7):

Lao-tzu said:

In remote antiquity, authentic people breathed yin and yang, and all living beings admired their virtue, thus harmonizing in a peaceful way. In those times, leadership was hidden, spontaneously giving rise to a pure simplicity. Simplicity had not been lost as yet, and so the multitude of beings was very composed.

Later on, society deteriorated. Toward the time of Fu-hsi, a flourishing of deliberate effort occurred; everyone was about to abandon their innocent mind and consciously comprehend the universe. Their virtues were complex and were not unified.

When the epoch in which Shen-nung and Huang-ti governed the country and elaborated calendars for harmonizing yin and yang, everybody kept upright and willingly stood the charge of looking and hearing. Therefore, they were in order but not in harmony.

Subsequently, in the society of the times of the Shang-yin dynasty, the people came to savor and covet things, and intelligence was beguiled by external things. Essential life lost its reality.

Upon the arrival of the Chou dynasty, we have diluted purity and lost simplicity, straying from the Way (*tao*) to conceive artificialities, acting on the basis of dangerous qualities. There have arisen the sprouts of craftiness and ruse; cynical erudition is used in pretending to arrive at wisdom, false cynicism is used to intimidate the masses, the elaboration of poetry and prose is used to attain fame and honor. Everyone wants to employ knowledge and astuteness to be socially recognized, and loses the foundation of the global source; therefore, in society there are those who lose their natural lives. This deterioration has been a gradual process, which has been occurring over a long time.

Thus, the learning of complete people consists in making their essential nature return to nonbeing, and allow their minds to float in amplex. [Conversely], mundane learning does away with intrinsic virtues and reduces the essential nature; while internally they preoccupy themselves for their health, [mundane people] resort to violent actions to confuse in regard to name and honor. This is something complete people do not do.

What eradicated intrinsic virtue was self-consciousness; what reduced essential nature was the cutting of its living creativity. If people are complete, they have certitude about the meaning of death and life and understand the patterns of glory and ignominy. Even if the whole world praises them, that does not give them added breath, and even if the whole world repudiates them, that does not inhibit them. They have attained the key to the essential Way (*tao*).

The degenerative view of spiritual and social evolution seems to our contemporaries a romantic myth. However, according to Lenski's statistics in *Human Societies* (1978)—based on the data in Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas*—only 2% of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies have a class system, while private ownership of land is completely absent in 89% of them (and only 'rare' in the other 11%) (Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, recent discoveries of paleopathology show that prior to 4,000 BC (or to 12,000 BC in the only sites, located in the Nile valley, which are an exception to this rule) there was no violence between human beings (Lenski, 1978; Lochouart, 1993; van der Dennen, 1995; DeMeo, 1998; Taylor, 2005).ⁱⁱ Likewise, research by ethnoecologists has shown that in the Amazon, where the topsoil is extremely poor, regions that have been inhabited for a longer time exhibit a higher degree of biodiversity than those that have been inhabited for shorter time or that are as yet uninhabited (Descola, 1996)—which seems to show that the intuitive wisdom of the aborigines was such that their interventions on the environment optimized ecological relations. On the contrary, as T. Dale and V. G. Carter (1955) have shown, most civilizations destroyed themselves by irrationally preying on their environment, and, in the case of Western civilization, Modernity developed what Gregory Bateson (1968) called a "conscious purpose against nature," which, as so many of the most upright and regardful scientists on the planet have warned, will very likely put an end to life on our planet, or at least disrupt human society—not unlikely in the current century.ⁱⁱⁱ (The data supporting this degenerative view are truly overwhelming; for a review, cf. Taylor [2005] and Capriles [work in progress].)

It takes an extremely long time for the delusion that Shakyamuni called *avidya* and that Heraclitus called *lethe* to develop to a degree like the one it has attained today and thus give rise to the most extreme instances of the "reverse law" or "law of inverted effect" (Watts, 1959) inherent to this delusion, which are proper of the moment when the latter is about to reach its logical extreme and thus complete its *reductio ad absurdum*. In our time, the fact that our perception of reality is distorted has been proved by the hellish existence produced by our attempts to reach the cardinal point of a technological Eden: we are willing to sacrifice all future generations and many of our contemporaries in exchange for a seeming comfort that is only available to a privileged minority, but that does not provide true happiness even to this minority. Like all other members of technological civilization, those who live in opulence are always beset by dissatisfaction, anxiety and neurosis, and have no access to the nonconceptual unveiling of the nondual Flow of our true nature that alone makes life truly Meaningful (in fact, those who are near the outermost bounds of the higher point of the wheel of *samsara*, as Blaise Pascal [1962] made it clear, are made to fall far more precipitously by the wheel's turnings). However, as we have seen, the fact that

we have come to the very verge of the self-destruction of human society—and possibly of our biological species, or perhaps even of all life on our planet—for the reasons summed up above, has opened the hitherto nonexistent possibility that the delusion that the Buddha called *avidya* and that Heraclitus called *lethe* may be surpassed on the level of the species.

The project of Modernity is a product of the exacerbated delusion of present day normality, which involves an extreme perceptual fragmentation and hence a lack of overall appreciation of the indivisible continuum and network of interdependences that is the universe—and delusion is by definition the opposite of the sanity and mental health. A. Korzybski (4th Ed. 5th printing, 1973) viewed sanity as lying in the structural fit between our reactions to the world and what is actually going on in the world, and insanity as consisting in the lack of such fit—which the author in question explained in terms of his renowned map-territory analogy: the map is not the territory but, when correct, it has a structure similar to that of the territory that allows it to be useful in dealing with the latter, and that is at the root of the structural fit that in his view is the index of sanity. However, conceptual maps are digital, whereas the sensory territory is analog, and the digital, being discontinuous, cannot correspond to the analog, which is continuous. In other works (cf. Capriles, 1994, among others) I have illustrated this lack of match with many examples; here, it may suffice to refer to the mismatch between a digital photograph and the analog reality it is supposed to replicate: though the lack of fit is minimized if the number of dpis is extremely high, even in this case it would suffice to zoom in to see a combination of colored squares bearing no resemblance to the continuous reality photographed. Thus we cannot admit Korzybski's reduction of sanity to agreement with conventional scientific interpretations of reality,^{iv} but must conclude it lies in neither mistaking our conceptual maps for the territory of the given, nor believing that a map is absolutely correct and true while its opposite is absolutely incorrect and false: this mistake and belief are instances of the basic human delusion under consideration.

In spite of the above, digital maps are instrumental to our aims a great deal of the time—yet very often their use causes effects diametrically contradicting those we intend to produce, being the source of the most extreme lack of fit between the ones and the others. In fact, because of the radical difference between the digital code of the process in 1895 Freud (1974) called secondary (based on the computations of the left cerebral hemisphere) and the analog code of the process he called primary (based on the computations of the right hemisphere), the action of consciousness in terms of the former is very often read invertedly in the latter—which causes it to yield the effects diametrically opposed to the ones intended proper of the “reverse law” or “law of inverted effect.” Furthermore, the exacerbation of the delusion called *avidya* or *marigpa*, and hence of what *Gestalt* theory calls figure-ground mind and of understanding exclusively in terms of digital secondary process, has caused the figures we single out in the sensory continuum to appear to us as in themselves isolated from the ground, making consciousness unaware of the indivisibility of the analog continuum of the territory and of the interdependence, not only of the singled out figure and the rest of the continuum, but of all *potential* figures among themselves. The result is the already mentioned lack of overall understanding of the indivisible, analog continuum and network of interdependences that is the universe—which, according to the *Udaana* (third book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* in the Pali Canon, basis of the Hinayana), the Mahayana *Prajñaparamitasutras*, the philosophy of Nagarjuna (based on the latter sources) and other Buddhist sources and systems, is a central aspect of the human delusion called *avidya* or *marigpa*. K. Venkata Ramanan (1966, p.p. 107-108) paraphrases the explanation

in the *Prajñāparamitashastra*, which the Chinese attribute to Nagarjuna, of this essential aspect of delusion:

We select from out of the presented only the aspects of our interest and neglect the rest; to the rest that is neglected we become first indifferent and then blind; in our blindness, we claim completeness for the aspects we have selected. We seize them as absolute, we cling to them as complete truth... While the intellectual analysis of the presented content into its different aspects is conducive to and necessary for a comprehensive understanding, analysis is miscarried if the fragmentary is mistaken for the complete, the relative is mistaken for the absolute.

In the *Udaana*, Shakyamuni Buddha illustrated this aspect of the basic human delusion by the story of the six blind men and the elephant, according to which the one who held the elephant's head asserted the object to be like a pot, the one who held the ear said it was like a winnowing fan, and so on (Buddha Shakyamuni, ed. P. Steinthal, 1885, 1982, pp. 66-68; Venkata Ramanan, 1966, pp. 49-50, reference in note 138 to ch. I, p. 344): each of them held so firmly to his partial view, taking it to be the exact, absolute view of totality, that they failed to come to an agreement as to the nature of the object before them. The same story is told in the *Tathagatagarbhasutra* of the Third Promulgation, as follows (in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, vol. I, p. 295):

The king assembled many blind men and, [placing them before] an elephant, commanded, "Describe [this object's] particular characteristics." Those among them who felt the elephant's nose said that [the object] resembled an iron hook. Those who felt the eyes said that [it] resembled bowls. Those who felt the ears said [it] resembled winnowing baskets. Those who felt the back said it resembled a sedan chair, and those who felt the tail said it resembled a string. Indeed, though [their respective descriptions responded to the parts of the] elephant [they touched], they were lacking in overall understanding...

In a modified version of this story popularized by Sufi poets in Islamic countries (in Sana'i's *Hadiqah* the men were blind, but in Rumi's *Mathnavi* they were in the dark), each of the men grasped a different part of the pachyderm, reaching a diverse conclusion as to what the animal was: the one who took hold of its trunk said it was a hose; the one who seized its ear thought it was a fan; the one who put his hand on its back decided it was a throne; and the one who clasped its leg concluded it was a pillar. We could add that the one who grabbed its tail threw it away in terror, believing it to be a snake.

The result of the inverted meaning the contents of digital secondary process have in the analog code of primary process, of the perception of parts of the whole as intrinsically isolated essents and the incapacity of consciousness to apprehend interconnections, and in general of the basic human delusion called *avidya* or *lethe*, is the above-mentioned lack of fit between the aims behind our actions and the results these produce. In this regard I wrote elsewhere (Capriles, 2003):

A delusion is a distorted perception of reality. Someone who, being deluded in regard to the direction of cardinal points, tries to go south, at a given moment could as well discover she or he is going north. As we have seen, this happens all the time in our daily lives, as so often our attempts to get pleasure result in pain, the actions whereby we intend to get happiness give rise to unhappiness, what we do achieve security produces insecurity, and so on and on. In fact, the essential human delusion (*avidya* or *marigpa*) gives rise to an

inverted dynamics that often causes us to achieve with our actions the very opposite of what we set out to accomplish—which is what a popular twentieth century British-born author called “law of inverted effect” or “reverse law” (Watts, 1959). The great Dzogchen Master Vimalamitra provided us with an excellent example of this law in the *Three Sections of the Letters of the Five Spaces*, where he noted that all the happiness of *samsara*, even if it momentarily appears as such, is in reality only suffering, maturing in the same way as the effects of eating an appetizing yet poisonous fruit (Namkhai Norbu (1999/2001), p. 41):^v again and again the appetizing aspect of the fruits of *samsara* beguile us into gobbling them, yet we fail to learn from the ensuing stomachaches. In *The Precious Vase: Instructions on the Base of Santi Maha Samgha*, Chögyäl Namkhai Norbu explains the examples [in terms of the five senses] with which the *mahasiddha* Sarahapada illustrated this law (Namkhai Norbu, 1999/2001, p. 44):

“Not knowing what to accept and what to reject, even though we crave happiness we obtain only sorrow, like a moth that, attracted by a flame dives into it and is burnt alive; or like a bee that, due to its attachment to nectar, sucks a flower and cannot disengage from it, dying trapped inside; or like a deer killed by hunters while it listens to the sound of the flute; like fish that, attached to the taste of the food on the fisherman’s hook, die on the hot sand; like an elephant that, craving contact with something cool, goes into a muddy pool and dies because it cannot get out. In fact the *Treasury of the Dohas* (*Do ha mdzod*) says:

“Observe the deeds of the fish, the moth, the elephant, the bee and the deer, [each of which brings about its own suffering through attachment to objects of one of the five senses]! [...]”

From the *Three Sections of the Letters of the Five Spaces* (op. 3: p. 7, 1):

“There is no end to all the various secondary causes, just like following the mirage of a spring of water.”

“In fact all the beings that transmigrate through the power of *karma*, whether they are born in the higher or lower states, are in fact beguiled and dominated by the diverse secondary causes so whatever actions they perform become a cause of suffering. They are never content with what they do and there is nothing on which they can really rely...”

Each society has its conventions, which contradict those of many other societies and which are as arbitrary as the latter: while the Arabs see burping after partaking of a meal at someone else’s home as a sign of politeness showing one is satisfied, European convention would see the same behavior as a scandalous breach of etiquette. However, the problem does not lie in the difference of conventions, but in the fact that both the Arab and the European, just as all other peoples, mistaking convention (Greek *nomos*) for nature (Greek *physis*), see their own social rules as absolute, universal standards. Far worse, religiously sanctioned ideologies have engendered terrible forms of repression of children and women, a Caste system justifying oppression and dooming dalits to the worst forms of ignominy, etc. Likewise, insofar as the followers of each theistic religion take their own faith to be divinely sanctioned, and insofar as the followers of each ideology take their own doctrine to be the only true and/or just one, religious and ideological divergences have for millennia given rise to sheer insane behavior like wars, massacres, crucifixions, the Inquisition with its tortures and stake, lynching, etc. However, in the last centuries things have turned for the worst, for as we have seen, the currently prevailing ideology, which is that of progress and of science as the bearer of truth, has given rise to courses of behavior that are likely to destroy human society and even put an end to human life on this planet in the course of the present century and which as such are the most insane ever taken by our species.

Thus we can but agree with seventeenth century French thinker Blaise Pascal (1962), who compared the state of mind of normal individuals to a psychological disorder, and with ex-Frankfurt philosopher, social psychologist and New Age forerunner Erich Fromm (1955, pp. 14-15), who gave to understand that our society as a whole is way far from sanity:

Just as there is a *folie à deux* there is a *folie à millions*. The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane.

Antipsychiatry turned commonplace the idea that present day normality is a radical form of insanity, for it consists in being well adapted to an extremely deranged society, and as such implies becoming extremely deranged. In its turn, society is deranged because its members are affected by an extreme instance of the basic human delusion called *avidya* or *marigpa*, which has led to common, clearly insane cultural views and conventions. Roughly twelve centuries before Fromm, Buddhist *Madhyamika-Prasangika* Master and philosopher Chandrakirti^{vi} related the fable of a king that consulted a famous astrologer, who predicted that a rainfall of “maddening water” would pollute the reservoirs in his kingdom, as a consequence of which all who drank from them would be driven insane. Hence the king warned his ministers and subjects to prepare a protected supply of water and avoid drinking the deranging water. However, the subjects, being less wealthy, exhausted their reserves more rapidly, and soon had to drink contaminated water. Since the king and the ministers behaved quite differently from the subjects who had drunk the maddening water, the latter concluded that the former had become insane. When the ministers used up their reserves, they also had to drink the deranging water—upon which the rest of the subjects thought the ministers had become normal, and all agreed the only insane man was the king. Thus in order to keep his kingdom and avoid being impeached and put into an asylum, the king had no option but to drink the polluted water (Trungpa, 1976; Chöphel, 2005; Shah 1978 [for the Sufi version of the story]).

The modern exacerbation of the essential human delusion, by carrying to its logical extreme our sensation of being entities inherently separate and independent from the rest of nature, and in general our fragmentary perception of the universe as though it were the sum of intrinsically separate, self-existent and unconnected entities, has made us worse than the men with the elephant. The illusion of omnipotence of human reason and the distrust of Nature’s holistic, non-conceptual Wisdom caused us to feel that, for our earthly existence to be comfortable and pleasant, we had to control and dominate Nature; that the latter was imperfect and that we had to impose on it the “perfect order” we had imagined—which led us to develop and implement the technological project aimed at destroying the parts of the world that annoyed us and appropriating those that pleased us, which has gravely impaired the functionality of the worldwide ecosystem of which we are parts and on which our survival as a species depends. A popular Western author illustrated this by saying that our incapacity to grasp the unity of the coin of life led us to develop and apply powerful corrosives in order to destroy the side that we deemed undesirable—death, illness, pain, troubles, etc.—and to protect the side we considered desirable—life, health, pleasure, comfort, etc. Those corrosives, by boring a hole through the coin, now are on the verge of destroying the side we were intent on preserving.^{vii}

In order to illustrate the narrow and fragmentary state of consciousness inherent to *avidya*-*marigpa* that a tradition associated with the *Kalachakra Tantra* calls “small space-time-knowledge” (Tarthang Tulku, 1977), the Buddha Shakyamuni used the example of a frog that, having been confined throughout its life to the bottom of a well, thought the sky was a small blue circle. This is the type of consciousness illustrated by the famous adage of the tree blocking the view of the forest, concerning which Gregory Bateson said that, when it perceives an arc, it fails to realize that it is part of a circuit. Consequently, when an arc annoys us, we aim at it our powerful technological weapons, destroying the circuit of which they are a part; setting fire to the tree in front of us, we burn the forest in which we stand, bringing about our own destruction. In other of my works (Capriles, 1994, 2000b, 2003), I explained this in terms of the structure of the Four Noble Truths:

(1) The current ecological crisis is so grave that, if everything goes on as it is, human society will be disrupted and life may even come to disappear from the planet, possibly within the current century. Meanwhile, natural disasters will proliferate, our existence will become ever more miserable, and an increasing number of human beings will be incapable of adapting to the social and biological environment, which will give rise to extremely high levels of stress, neurosis and psychosis, addiction to the most harmful drugs, serious illnesses and suicides.

(2) There is a primary cause of the ecological crisis, which is the fragmentation of human perception and extreme selfishness inherent in fully developed *avidya*. If we feel and believe ourselves to be inherently separate from the rest of the human species, sooner or after we will give rise to the religious, social, economic, racial and ideological divisions, within societies as well as between different human groups, which are at the root of injustices and conflicts. If we are unaware of ecological interdependence and feel inherently separate from the rest of the ecosystem, we are likely to wish to destroy the aspects of nature that disturb us and to appropriate those we wrongly believe will endow us with comfort, pleasure and security—giving rise to the technological project that has destroyed the systems on which life depends.

(3) There is a solution to the ecological crisis, which lies in the eradication of its primary cause—the basic human delusion called *avidya* or *marigpa*—and of its secondary causes—the technological project of domination and exploitation of nature and of other human beings, and the severe political, economic and social inequality.

(4) The Buddhist Path can eradicate the causes of ecological crisis and restore an era of communitarian, harmonious social organization based on the systemic wisdom that frees us from the urge to obtain ever more manipulative knowledge, and allows us to use the knowledge we already possess in ways that are beneficial to the biosphere as a whole, and to all beings without distinctions.

All of this shows that fully developed *avidya*, as a delusion, is not unlike the ones psychiatrists describe as a result of the observation of their psychotic patients—the main difference between the one and the others being that unanimous consensus causes normal, socially sanctioned delusion to go unnoticed. The development of delusion impelled the process of degeneration that followed its course one era after another until, in the Iron Age, Era of Darkness or Dark Age (*kaliyuga*), it conceived the project of domination of nature and other human beings, and set to implement this project through the development of technology—which, toward the end of the Age in question, caused delusion to complete its *reductio ad absurdum*. The Pythagoreans had already conceived the technological project, which is the one Goethe described in his famous ballad, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (a

theme that later on was used by authors as diverse as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels [1970], Alan Watts [1973], José Lutzenberger [1978], and Arturo Eichler [1987], and which was put into music in the famous scherzo by Paul Dukas, into a cartoon (*Fantasy*) by Walt Disney, and into a ballet by Helga Swedlund and Walter Braunfelds): the apprentice used one of his master's spells to fulfill his duties effortlessly, but the charm went far beyond his control, and disaster ensued. Scientific knowledge allows us to develop the magic of technology, which, like the charms of the sorcerer's apprentice, makes it possible for us to realize surprising feats—such as flying, performing colossal tasks without exerting physical effort, and even reaching the moon. And, just as in the fable of the sorcerer's apprentice, at some time we lose control of the charm and wreak havoc on ourselves—in our case, coming to the verge of extinction. Alan Watts (1973) wrote:

When we fight the environment and disown it, our methods and weapons become part of it, part of the involuntary and uncontrollable aspect of *karma*. This, like in the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice, is the fate of all power games, not only in the areas of material power, but also in those of psychic and spiritual power. This is why one should not let oneself be beguiled by the many forms of psychic and mental discipline that promise ever greater control over thought and emotion, and even magical powers. All of those methods—unless they are designed specifically to be self-frustrating and thus to reduce to absurdity the ambition for power—are simply ego-trips of a highbrow and refined order, but often they produce such sensational short-term results that people are easily deceived by the pseudo-gurus who teach them.

Among others, Aldous Huxley (1961) and John Blofeld (1968) put forth statements similar to the above. However, rather than being a recent by-product of technological development, acute awareness of the dynamics expressed in the fable of the sorcerer's apprentice seems to have been general in high antiquity, and genuine Wisdom traditions always warned against this dynamics in their respective fables. Indian mythology featured the character of Matariswan, who in Greek mythology became Prometheus: the demigod who, having molded a clay statuette, stole the fire from the gods in order to animate it, giving rise to technology—which we have brought much farther than the ancient Greeks ever dreamed. Ivan Illich (1971) wrote:

The world of the primitive is governed by fate, facts and necessity. By stealing fire from the gods, Prometheus turned facts into problems, called necessity into question and defied fate. Classical man... was aware that he could defy fate-nature-environment, but only at his own risk. Contemporary man goes farther; he attempts to create the world in his image, to build a totally man-made environment, and then discovers that he can do so only on the condition of constantly remaking himself to fit it. We now must face the fact that man himself is at stake.

Prometheus, “the one who looks toward the future” or “who makes the polestar advance”, unleashed Zeus' wrath by his theft. As a result, the latter sent Pandora and her box into the world, to let out the evils; he conjured up a deluge that destroyed humankind; and he chained Prometheus to a rock in the Caucasus, where vultures would tear at his liver—which would grow again as soon as the last bit were devoured. Having played at being Prometheus, we human beings are enduring a torture that, unlike Prometheus', has not ceased at the term of thirty years, for no Heracles has the power to unchain us, and

unless we become Noah-like Deucalions, going aboard the Ark and recovering the horn of plenty, our torment will go on until we destroy our own species and possibly all life on this planet. For Deucalion to save the waters in the Ark and beget from Pyrrha a new humanity, Prometheus' brother, Epimetheus, "the one who looks back", must marry the Earth—source both of hope and of the evils—and from her beget Pyrrha. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it is said that "the devil is not evil; he only pursues the wrong star." The star he pursues is the polestar, which is the star of the North, the star of Prometheus: this is why E. F. Schumacher (1973) declared, "Any activity which fails to recognize a self-limiting principle is the devil".

The project of modernity stems from the rebellion of the technological Sisyphus against the spontaneity of becoming, which ancient Greeks called "fate". Our punishment is the mental state of the modern city-dweller, which, as Illich noted, may be compared to the torment of Sisyphus, who was chained to an enormous rock he had to roll up the hill to the pinnacle of hell, but which always slipped when he tried to place it at the top, dragging him down—so that immediately he had to begin rolling it up again. One of the versions of the myth presents Sisyphus—the rebellious descendent of Deucalion—as a paradigm for the *homo technicus* who has tried to destroy the "negative" side of the coin of life, attempting to kill death: he managed to temporarily chain Thanatos, so that for a while no one died on earth. However, since it is impossible to prevent death forever, Thanatos was liberated and Sisyphus was condemned to suffer his proverbial torment, corresponding to the mental state of those who have come to live totally outside the Now, hungrily anticipating a future that—since we are cut from the Now and our attention is directed to the future—can never become a Now.

Tantalus' crime was similar to Sisyphus'. Having been invited to the dinner of the gods, he stole the recipe for the Ambrosia, the panacea bestowing immortality. As a punishment, he was immersed in a lake to the neck, under trees with branches loaded with fruit, under a charm that prevented him from eating or drinking, for it caused the waters to recede when he lowered his mouth toward them, and the trees' branches to be blown away by the wind whenever he attempted to reach their fruits: his punishment was the exacerbation of the sensation of lack inherent in delusion, similar to the one that the mass media and other elements of modern life have induced in us.

The project of modernity is aptly represented by the biblical story of the tower of Babel, as an attempt to arrive at paradise through building, by means of linear intelligence, fragmentary vision and delusion, a material structure on earth—which produces an enormous confusion ending up in disaster. In the mystical tradition of the Hasidim, the project we are concerned with is represented by the fable of the Golem. It is well-known that, according to the Kabbalah, the word is the source of creation (the "four letters" of God's name cannot be pronounced, for the creative principle must not be put in the place of the created and taken for a product of thought); one day, a Hasid decided to create a servant who would perform his domestic tasks, and to this end he molded a doll with clay, wrote on its forehead the first, the thirteenth and the last Hebrew letters (*aleph*, *mem* and *thau*), which spelled word *emeth*, meaning "truth," and circumambulated the holy temple anticlockwise. The homunculus came to life and began to carry out its masters' household duties, while constantly increasing in size. When the android reached an inconvenient size, the master was meant to erase the first of the letters on its forehead, leaving the other two, which formed the word *meth*, meaning "death"—upon which the Golem would instantly dissolve and become mud again. Once, when the homunculus was becoming too big for its

master's household, the latter fell asleep, and so the Golem grew so much that, when the master woke up, it was about to cause the house to break apart. Unable to reach the forehead of such an enormous humanoid, the master had to pile up tables and chairs until, finally, he managed to erase the *aleph*—whereupon the Golem instantly dissolved, letting so much mud fall on the Hasid as to bury him and cause his death. In the fiction of our time, it is Dr. Frankenstein who appoints himself as demiurge and gives life to a Golem, with results analogous to those obtained by the Hasid of the Hebrew tale.

The Sufis have similar a similar story, in which a group of ignorant, power-seeking men went to see Jesus in order to obtain the word that revived the dead. Initially, Jesus refused to give it to them, but realizing that the men would only learn from experience, he gave them the word. When they were walking through the desert on their way home, they found a heap of bones and, suspecting that Jesus could have deceived them, they decided to try the word's power. As soon as they pronounced it, the bones flew up and joined into an animal skeleton, were covered with flesh, and became the live wild beast to which they had belonged—which immediately devoured the would-be sorcerers.

The above stories illustrate the fact that the technological project has reduced delusion to absurdity by making patent the boomerang effect of the projects and actions conceived and carried out under delusion. Einstein noted (in Gilliam, 1986):

The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophes.

However, what has “changed everything” is modern technology in general, and what must be changed in order to avert the destruction of humankind is not only our ways of thinking, but also—and especially—our experience and perception. If catalyzed by genuine Wisdom traditions, rather than destroying the ecosystem, the “boomerang effect” of technological action will destroy human delusion, for it is the latter that our scientific-technological project has led to its *reductio ad absurdum*. This was apparently foreseen by Kant (1957), who asserted that the world is destined for perpetual peace, which would come about either through human foresight, or through a series of catastrophes that leave no other choice. This is also the meaning of the statement by E. F. Schumacher (1973):

We can say today that man is far too clever to be able to survive without wisdom. No one is really working for peace unless he is working primarily for the restoration of wisdom.

In the last decades of the last century, it became fashionable for philosophers and sociologists to interpret as a *stage beyond modernity* to be known as “postmodernity” the current, advanced stage of modernity, which combines illusions distinctive of *modernity* (e.g., that change and innovation are good in themselves, and that industrial and economic growth, technological progress and so on will give rise to ever greater human perfection), with the disenchantment with many other aspects of modernity proper of the *decadence of modernity*, and with aspects of the *reaction against modernity* resulting from the *reductio ad absurdum* of the latter. However, since modernity is the stage of the cosmic cycle that sets the conditions that make it possible for basic human delusion and all that developed along with it throughout the cosmic cycle to complete their *reductio ad absurdum*, so that they may be surpassed and the cosmic cycle may end, postmodernity must necessarily arise

after the end of the current cosmic cycle, as a result of the eradication of the consciousness, relational structures and institutions that developed in it, and coincide with the restoration of ecommunism, and therefore of Communion, plenitude and harmony. As I write these words, the cosmic cycle has not yet ended and the new ecommunism has not yet begun, for basic delusion, perceptual fragmentation and instrumentality are still rampant, right wing institutions (Illich, 1971; Capriles, 1994) continue to prevail, the ideals of modernity (such as industrial and economic growth, technological progress, and history as a process of perfecting) keep being the basic guiding principles for most of our species, and the state of Communion is far from becoming widespread. Furthermore, the fact that some intellectual circles disenchanted with the ideals of modernity have fancied the current decadence and *reductio ad absurdum* of modernity to be a new period beyond modernity to be called “postmodernity,” shows that still in our time phases and fashions succeed each other with great momentum, as is proper of modernity, which rejects tradition and values innovation and change. This essay calls for the Revolution in all planes that will install the genuine postmodernity, corresponding to what I have been calling “postmodern ecommunism.”

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ⁱ This symbolism is evidently far more sexist than Eastern ones.

ⁱⁱ In fact, Lochouarn (1993) showed how, on the basis of the study of a very large quantity of European and North-African human fossils from the Paleolithic and the Neolithic, paleopathology has established that in those eras human beings did not die from traumatism caused by other human beings, and that, on the

contrary, whenever possible, wounds and traumatism caused by the attack of animals or by accidents were cured with the help of other individuals. In the following years the research done by paleopathology encompassed the whole world, having as its object a very high number of ancient corpses; we find a wide summary of this research in van der Dennen (1995). Likewise, there are summaries of the subsequent results of this research in DeMeo (1998) and Taylor (2005).

iii I think it is advisable not to try to predict exactly when would the disintegration of human society or the end of human life on our planet take place if current trends were sustained, for so far most such predictions have proved wrong. The fact that scientific predictions have rarely been fulfilled with precision, is shown by the ones made in *The Ecologist Editing Team* (1971), which was supported in a document by many of the most notable scientists of the United Kingdom and by organizations such as The Conservation Society, the Henry Doubleday Research Association, The Soil Association, Survival International, and Friends of the Earth. The authors (which included Edward Goldsmith) asserted that:

“After examination of the relevant available information has made us conscious of the extreme gravity of the global situation in our days. However, if we allow prevailing tendencies to persist, the rupture of society and the irreversible destruction of the systems that sustain life on this planet, possibly towards the end of the [twentieth] century, doubtlessly within the lifetimes of our children, will be inevitable.”

The same applies to the predictions by Michel Bosquet, who warned over three decades ago that (in Senent, Juan; Saint Marc, Philippe & others [1973]):

“Humankind needed thirty centuries to gather momentum; there are thirty years left to brake before the abyss.”

More pondered, but perhaps still too tight in his dating, German-Ecuadorian deep ecologist Arturo Eichler pointed out in the late 1980s that it would have been an exaggeration to predict the total destruction of the systems that sustain life in the twentieth century, but also asserted that only a total immediate transformation might perhaps make our survival possible beyond the first half of the present century (personal communication).

On his part, Lester Brown (1990), from the Worldwatch Institute in Washington, D.C., may have also proposed too fixed a threshold when he asserted at the Global Forum on the Environment and Development for Survival that took place in Moscow from January 15-19, 1990 that:

“If we cannot turn around some of the prevailing tendencies in the future, we run the very real risk that environmental degradation may produce economic ruin, as it has already done in parts of Africa, and that the two may begin to feed upon each other, making any future progress extremely difficult... ..by the year 2030, we will either have produced an environmentally sustainable world economic system or we will have clearly failed and, much before that, environmental degradation and economic ruin, feeding upon each other, will have led to social disintegration. We will do it by 2030 or we will have clearly failed.”

In 1998, a group of scientists comprising many of the Nobel prize winners of the planet warned against the irreversible destabilization and destruction of the ecosystem through the greenhouse effect—which, given the ever-increasing heat absorbed by the Pacific Ocean, which then is distributed, has been giving rise to ever more extreme “El Niño” phenomena, which have wreaked havoc around the world. Even James Lovelock, who previously had made fun of ecologists, pointed out that Gaia (the planet considered as a living organism) would be incapable of maintaining its homeostasis (health) and life with an index of human incidence upon its systems such as the one that has characterized recent years and decades. More recently, another conference of climatic experts made even direr warnings.

iv However, contemporary physics, as well as brain science and other contemporary sciences, have come to conclusions regarding the structure of reality that are in harmony with the teachings of Buddhism and similar systems. In regard to the coincidences of physics and Asian mystical systems, there are renowned books by Capra, Bohm & Hiley, Bohm, Zukav, LeShan, Bentov, Bentov & Bentov, Wilber (Ed.), Ricard & Thuan, etc. Concerning brain science, there are many works by various authors.

v The quotation is from Vimalamitra (terma by Jamyang Khyentse [1820-1892]), *kLong lnga'i yi ge dum bu gsum pa* (*Man ngag thams cad kyi rgyal po klong lnga'i yi ge dum bu gsum pa*), p. 6, 6.

vi The original Buddhist story was told in Chandrakirti's *Bodhisattvayogacharyachaturshatakatika* (Tib., *dbu ma bzhi brgya pa'i 'grel pa*, or *byang chub sems dpa'i rnal 'byor spyod pa gzhi brgya pa'i rgya cher 'grel pa*): a Commentary to Aryadeva's *Chatuhishataka* (Tib., *bzhi brgya pa*).

vii This example was used by Alan Watts, from whom I have often borrowed it. Unfortunately I do not remember in which of Watts' books it was used.